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TO AN OLD DISCIPLE.

MY DEAR FRIEND:—My heart is drawn towards you. I too am going down the hill of life, and the longer I live, the more sympathy do I feel with the aged. I have no longer the sprightliness of youth. In common with you I know the sorrow caused by the failure of hopes. A light heart carries the young swiftly along, but in us, who have passed the middle of life, the spirit is at least chastened, if not somewhat broken. Once past middle life, we seldom forget our griefs, as in youth. Indeed the memory of some sorrows never grows dim. Twenty years after his child is thought to be dead, Jacob cries out, “Joseph is not,” as if he had been missing but a day or a week. We too have lost friend after friend, not only by death, but by alienation. Very few of the friends of our childhood live to love us. One said: “I walk the streets, I go to the assemblies of my brethren, but I find none who began life with me. I stand alone like a withered tree, where once was a forest clothed with verdure.” We may have our descendants around us, and “children’s children are the crown of old men.” But sometimes children give as much pain as pleasure. Or, God may have written us childless. If so, how sad are our homes! Or, greedy heirs may be indecently hovering around to pounce upon our pelf as soon as we are gone.

Nor care they how soon we are called away. How many of us too are cut off (sometimes by our own fault) from useful employment! We lack occupation. The mind, not being drawn out in healthy action, preys upon itself. Our latter years are often spent in melancholy uselessness. Our senses are often blunted as we grow old. Sweet sounds and sweet odours and delicious flavours cannot now regale us as in our younger days. To us the blue sky is no longer blue, and the green mountains are no longer green, and the voice of birds is no longer music. Great changes have come on. Times, manners, fashions, customs, habits, opinions have all changed, nor have we changed with them. The world often seems to us to be moving too fast or too slowly, and we cry out, "what are we coming to?" One, who had long served God and his generation, seeing how things were going, thus wrote

"Prophet of ills, why should I live,
Or by my sad forebodings grieve
Whom I can serve no more?
I only can their loss bewail,
Till life's exhausted sorrows fail,
And the last pang is o'er."

The pious aged have no deeper sorrows than those, which spring from the memory of their sins. Job said, "Thou makest me to possess the iniquities of my youth." David cried: "Remember not against me the sins of my youth." The late Dr. Moses Hoge, of blessed memory, said: "I feel great need of offering the prayer of the old bishop, who said 'O God, pardon my sins of omission.'" He, who in old age feels no need of sorrow for past sins, is no child of God. Nor can we fail to see that our time on earth is short

A few more days, and our career will be run. We must bid farewell to all we have ever known; we must go to an untried eternity, and undergo the scrutiny of God. Each of us too has sorrows, unknown to men, and, so far as we know, peculiar to ourselves. We have not breathed them to any mortal, and perhaps we never shall, but the heart knoweth its own bitterness.

Yet all is not sad in our state. We have memories of joys, of mercies, and of friends, which, though tinged with a brown shade, are dear to our hearts. In general too we are treated with respect. Good men think with Solomon that "the hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness." The respect paid us is well suited to smooth our way. We have also stores of experience, which wealth could not buy. We have been taught the art of walking in darkness and having no light, and yet trusting in the Lord. We know that all is not lost, which is brought into danger. We know better than the young disciple what is meant by such texts as these, "When I am weak, then am I strong;" "he that loseth his life, shall find it;" "I have meat to eat, that ye know not of." A thousand good lessons of this sort has God taught us. We know too that in his providence, as in nature, the darkest hour is just before day. Why may it not be so with us, as our sky is more and more lowering? May not eternal day be ready to burst upon us? Indeed a thousand mercies still surround us. If our hearts are right, we cannot fail to see them. Let us often count them up.

Will you permit one, who is perhaps your junior, and who is less than the least of all saints, to give you

a few words of counsel? If the advice given is good follow it; if not good, reject it.

1. As long as you can, maintain habits of bodily activity. If you cannot do much, do what you can.

2. Keep your mind employed. Many aged men review their youthful studies. President Edwards reviewed his Euclid every year. Some begin new studies late in life, as Dr. Scott and Dr. Bogue. Read something with care every day, or cause it to be read to you. The history of the aged is full of warnings against idleness of mind, and laziness of body. Your physician and pastor can both give you many reasons in favour of activity. The average length of life among retired merchants, who have given up *all* business, is said not to exceed two or three years. If you live in idleness, life will soon be a burden. Beware!

3. If you have property, retain exclusive control of enough to keep you from want. A dependent old age may be unavoidable, and, when it is, should be borne submissively. But it is a great trial. If men will treat you well without property, they will also, if you have your own means. The reverse of this is not *always* true.

4. But beware of covetousness, that universal sin. It is very apt to grow rapidly on the aged. Be ashamed to deny to those, who have a right to expect it, a share in your estate, when you can divide it. As far as you can, be your own almoner and executor.

5. Be always trying to do good by word and deed, by precept and example. Encourage the timid, warn the reckless, visit the poor, support humane and missionary institutions, teach the ignorant, be eyes to the blind, and feet to the lame, make the widow's heart to

sing for joy, and do whatever will bless men and honour God. "No man liveth to himself." "As you have opportunity, do good to all men."

6. Cultivate cheerfulness of temper. Try to be pleased with your lot and your generation. Be not a murmurer and complainer. A sour old man or woman is neither happy, nor useful, nor amiable. Remember, the birds sang, the lambs skipped, and the children laughed when you were young, and they always will do it. Find not fault needlessly. "Say not thou, what is the cause the former days were better than these? for thou inquirest not wisely concerning this." Ever since Adam fell, there have been wicked men and wicked deeds on earth. I exceedingly like a common saying of a pious old English bishop, "Serve God and be cheerful."

7. Yield not to tormenting despondency about the cause of Christ. The Church is safe. She is graven on the palms of her Redeemer's hands. The cause of piety may decline in one place or at one time, but Christ's kingdom is gaining every year. The saints may lose a battle, but not the war. Christ loves the Church more than you do. "He shall not fail nor be discouraged till he have set judgment in the earth." "Hast thou not known? hast thou not heard, that the Everlasting God, the Lord, the Creator of the ends of the earth fainteth not, neither is weary?" "No weapon formed against Zion shall prosper." "The earth shall be full of the knowledge of the Lord, as the waters cover the sea, for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it." Rest assured that Christ "shall see the travail of his soul and be satisfied."

8. Make yourself well acquainted with the promises

of God, especially those, which have a peculiar pertinency to you. If you are a widow, hear him saying, "A father of the fatherless and a judge of the widows is God in his holy habitation." "He relieveth the fatherless and "widow." See the Concordance under the word "widow." Are you childless? Thus saith the Lord unto the [childless] "that keep my Sabbaths, and choose the things that please me, and take hold of my covenant; even unto them will I give in mine house and within my walls a place and a name better than of sons and daughters: I will give them an everlasting name, that shall not be cut off." Are you poor? The promise is: "Thy bread and thy water are sure." "A little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked." Are you wearied in the greatness of your way? "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength." "The feeble among them shall be as David." And how was David? Though a stripling, he slew a bear, and a lion, and the giant of Gath. Whatever be your condition or fears, here are the promises to all the aged pious: "They shall bring forth fruit in old age." "Even to your old age I am He, and even to hoar hairs I will carry you: I have made, and I will bear, even I will carry you and deliver you."

"What more could he say, than to you he has said?"

Therefore set your hope and put your trust in God. Embrace the promises. They can never fail to those who rest upon them. Nothing but unbelief can annihilate them. Take firm hold of them and your last days shall be your best days, and as the outward man waxes weaker, the inward man shall be renewed day

by day, and God himself shall be your God. "It is one of the best sights to see silver hairs adorned with golden virtues," yea, with graces more precious than gold. Have faith in God. Hope to the end.

9. Study to acquire and maintain clear views of the riches and freeness of Christ. He is a Prophet. "Learn of him." He is a Priest. Rely on his great sacrifice and intercession. His intercession is as precious as his blood. If you wish an assurance that you shall never fall into condemnation, here it is. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan hath desired to have you that he may sift you as wheat; but I have prayed for thee that thy faith fail not." Christ is a King. His "throne is for ever and ever." He has all power in heaven and in earth. He is the vine, ye are the branches. Because he lives, you shall live also. He is the good Shepherd, and none is able to pluck his sheep out of his hand, nor his lambs out of his bosom. He is God, and therefore counts it not robbery to be equal with God. He is man, and therefore he is not ashamed to call us brethren. He was dead, and so he made expiation. He is alive for ever more, and so we shall never perish. If sin calls for a curse, the death of Christ calls louder for pardon. If he is the Author of our faith, He is also its Finisher. Study his character and work. You cannot know too much of him. He is the desire of all nations, the delights of the sons of men, God over all, blessed for ever.

10. Endeavour to glorify God in all your sorrows, and especially in your death. If your children give you grief, say as David in his old age: "Though my house be not so with God [as I could wish] yet hath he made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all

things and sure." If your children are cut down in a way that makes you tremble for their souls, say as Eli: "It is the Lord; let him do what seemeth him good." If men revile you, say as the royal Psalmist, "Let him curse . . . It may be God will look upon mine affliction and reward me good for this cursing." If you be under any affliction which is common to men, why should you think it strange? "Shall we receive good at the hand of the Lord, and shall we not receive evil" also? If you can say nothing to the praise of God in your afflictions, at least be "dumb and open not your mouth." If your afflictions be strange, so were Christ's. "He was tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin." "If we suffer with him, we shall also reign with him." By quietness and patience in affliction, you will be prepared to honour God in your death. It is as much a duty to glorify God in death, as in life. We may, by his grace, do more in an hour at death, than we have done in years before. Samson's greatest achievement against the enemies of God and of his Church, was in his death. Our last battle is commonly our greatest. Happy is he, who is able to shout and sing, "O death, where is thy victory?" "Blessed are the dead, who die in the Lord."

There is something very remarkable in the fact that the aged seldom fall into so great a decay of their faculties as to forget those things, which have most engaged their affections. Nearly two thousand years ago, Cicero (in his treatise concerning Old Age,) said that he had never heard of a miser's memory so far failing him, that he forgot where his treasure was hid. He loved that most, and he remembered it longest. I have seen a pious man, who was said to be one hundred

and six years old. His memory was so far gone that he could no more learn any man's name. Yet he could repeat many of Watts's hymns, and give an intelligible account of the way of life. It is said that Bishop Beveridge in his old age, being near death, was visited by some of his old friends, who, by turns, took his hand and said: "Bishop Beveridge, do you know me?" His answer was, "No." His wife asked the same question, and received the same answer. At length one said: "Bishop Beveridge, do you know Jesus Christ?" "Yes, O yes," said he, "I shall never forget him. When sinking in despair under the load of my sins, Jesus Christ showed me mercy and saved me. And he has been with me ever since."

Polycarp suffered martyrdom at Smyrna in the year of our Lord 166, aged ninety-five years. The historian says that "when he appeared before the proconsul, the latter said to him, "Swear, curse Christ, and I will set you free!" The old man answered, "Eighty and six years have I received only good at his hands. Can I then curse my King and Saviour?" When the proconsul continued to press him, Polycarp said, "Well then, if you desire to know who I am, I tell thee freely, *I am a Christian!* If you desire to know what Christianity is, appoint an hour, and hear me." The proconsul, who here showed that he would gladly have saved him, if he could silence the people, said to Polycarp, "Only persuade the people." He replied, "To you I felt myself bound to render an account, for our religion teaches us to treat the powers ordained by God with becoming reverence, as far as is consistent with our salvation. But as for those without, I consider them undeserving any defence from me."

And justly too! for what would it have been but throwing pearls before swine, to attempt to speak of the gospel to a wild, tumultuous, and fanatical mob? After the governor had in vain threatened him with the wild beasts and the fire, he made the herald publicly announce in the circus, that Polycarp had confessed himself a Christian. These words contained the sentence of death against him. The people instantly cried out, "This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the enemy of the gods, who has taught so many not to pray to the gods and not to sacrifice."

As soon as the proconsul had complied with the demand of the populace, that Polycarp should perish on the funeral pile, Jews and Gentiles hastened with the utmost eagerness to collect the wood from the workshops and the baths. When they wished to fasten him with nails to the pile, the old man said, "Leave me thus, I pray, unfastened. He, who has enabled me to abide the fire, will give me strength also to remain firm on the stake." Before the fire was lighted, he prayed thus: "O Lord, Almighty God! the Father of thy beloved Son, Jesus Christ; through whom we have received the knowledge of thee! God of the angels, and of the whole creation; of the whole human race, and of the saints, who live in thy presence! I thank thee that thou hast thought me worthy of this day, and this hour, to share the cup of thy Christ among the number of thy witnesses!"

Thus praying, the flame was kindled, and he went to heaven as it were in a chariot of fire.

Thus God fulfils the promises, "Even to your old

age I am He, and even to hoar hairs I will carry you.”
 “I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.”

Aged disciple, can you not trust Him? Is he not worthy? May you not say, “I will not fear what man can do unto me;” “All the days of my appointed time will I wait till my change come;” “Lord, what thou wilt, when thou wilt, and how thou wilt;” “I know no will but thine;” “The Lord is my portion;” “Jesus, my Lord and my God, to thee I commit my spirit in life, in death, and for ever.”

A PRAYER FOR AN OLD DISCIPLE.

Thou God of my fathers, thou Friend of sinners, thou Judge of all the earth! in thee do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion. Deliver me in thy righteousness, and cause me to escape: incline thine ear unto me and save me. Be thou my strong habitation, whereunto I may continually resort; thou hast given commandment to save me; for thou art my rock and my fortress. Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man. For thou art my hope, O Lord God: thou art my trust from my youth. By thee have I been holden up from the womb: my praise shall be continually of thee. I am as a wonder unto many; but thou art my strong refuge. Let my mouth be filled with thy praise, and with thy honour all the day long. Cast me not off in the time of old age; forsake me not when my strength faileth. I will go in the strength of the Lord God: I will make mention of thy righteousness, even of thine only. O God, thou hast taught me from my youth: and hitherto have I declared

thy wondrous works. Now also, when I am old and grey-headed, O God, forsake me not, until I have showed thy strength unto this generation, and thy power to every one that is to come. Thou which hast showed me great and sore troubles shalt quicken me again, and shalt bring me up again from the depths of the earth. Thou shalt increase my greatness, and comfort me on every side. God, be merciful to me a sinner. Let not my iniquities prevail against me. Let not my soul perish. Apply to me the merits of thy dear Son. Bless my fellow-men. Fill the earth with thy glory. Build thou the walls of Jerusalem. Take not the Holy Spirit from me. Make haste to save me. I ask all in the worthy name of Jesus Christ. Amen.

Darkness overspreads us here,
But the night wears fast away;
Jacob's star will soon appear,
Leading on eternal day!
Now 'tis time to rouse from sleep,
Trim our lamps, and stand prepared,
For our Lord strict watch to keep,
Lest he find us off our guard.

Though already saved by grace,
From the hour we first believed;
Yet while sin and war have place,
We have but a part received;
Still we for salvation wait,
Every hour it nearer comes!
Death will break the prison gate,
And admit us to our homes.